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SUBJECT: ORTEGA CALLS FOR ANTI-U.S. ORGANIZATION OF LATIN AMERICAN STATES AND PLEDGES TROUBLE AT THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert J. Callahan, Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (U) In a March 4 speech at a Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) rally following the presentation of credentials by ambassadors from Brazil and Finland, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega called for the creation of an Organization of Latin American and Caribbean States to counter the negative and "imperialistic" influence on the U.S. in the region. Ortega said the new organization should specifically exclude the U.S. and Canada. Such an organization, he stated, would be more representative of the region than the OAS, would unite Latin Americans, and would not "subordinate" itself to the interests of the U.S., which is a "troublemaker" in the OAS. Only in this new organization could Latin American work together as a block to confront the United States and the capitalist system. Ortega pledged to promote the new organization at the April Summit of the Americas.

12. (C) Ortega also announced that he will demand that the OAS reinstate Cuba as a full member and end all countries' sanctions against the island at the upcoming Summit of the Americas. "We are suffering from the sin of omission" by falling under the influence of the U.S. in denying a seat to Cuba, he stated. (Note: Ortega recently has sought to expand already strong ties with Cuba, including expansion of health and literacy programs with Cuba, as well as cooperation with Cuba's Ministry of the Interior (MININT). End Note.)

13. (C) The Foreign Ministry (MINREX) has refused our requests to discuss Ortega's new initiative and the GoN's plans for the Summit. MINREX America's Director Rene Morales told PolCouns that "no one at the Ministry" would be available in the foreseeable future to discuss Ortega's proposal or their Summit agenda. Javier Melendez, Executive Director of the Institute for Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEEPP), noted that Ortega has made a similar proposal in the past and would be unlikely to pursue this agenda alone. He suggested that Ortega could be expected to make public statements in support of the anti-U.S. organization at the Summit in conjunction with other ALBA members, notably Venezuela and Bolivia.

14. (C) Comment. Ortega's proposal for an anti-U.S. Latin American organization is not new or surprising. FSLN leaders, including Ortega himself, have made clear their disdain for the OAS and their view that the organization represents an unwelcome vehicle for criticism and oversight of its anti-democratic trends, especially with regard to elections. Following international criticism of the municipal elections fraud, Ortega called the OAS "the pawn of the Empire" and claimed it was involved in a systematic campaign against his government. His apparent willingness to raise trouble over this proposal at the Summit, however, even as his government attempts to persuade international donors, including the U.S., to resume suspended aid, is striking. It could suggest that Ortega may have determined that he is more likely to get the financial and technical support he needs from ALBA partners and that he is increasingly willing to do what is necessary, including causing trouble at the Summit, to secure that aid. Likewise, he may also be trying to assert ideological leadership within the ALBA group even as his financial dependency on Chavez grows.

CALLAHAN